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SUBJECT: ANGOLA SETS 2008 FOR LEGISLATIVE AND 2009 FOR
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: Charge d'affaires Francisco J. Fernandez,
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Angola's highest political consultative body, the Council of the Republic, met on December 20 and announced legislative elections for 2008 and presidential elections a year later. This announcement confirms speculation that the government will not meet its previously stated goal of holding elections in 2007 and effectively ends speculation that presidential and legislative elections might occur simultaneously. The 23 member council, comprised of the leaders of the three branches of government, opposition party chiefs and civil society leaders, last met in 2004, when it announced elections for 2006. During his opening speech, President dos Santos stated that with registration underway, the electoral process was practically irreversible. The president's speech and council deliberations were made public in real time, a first for Angola, and a positive step towards greater transparency. The next step is to make the recommendation official, something that would then give all players a real electoral timetable. USG efforts should now focus on getting the Angolans to accept this timetable, and thus avoid the years of speculation and uncertainty that followed the 2004 announcement when no action to make the date official was taken. END SUMMARY

Process practically irreversible despite new timeline

¶12. (U) President dos Santos convened the Conselho da Republica on December 20th to discuss a timeline for elections. Dos Santos quickly laid out topics of discussion during his opening remarks, which were publicized in print and broadcast news, a first for Angola. Focus was kept on the need to develop new plans for the future; only slight mention was given to 'various constraints' that affected the government's ability to hold elections originally planned for 2006. He also pointed out that presidential and legislative elections should not be simultaneous, as the constitution calls for the former every five years and the latter every four. He ended with the sentiment that the electoral process has become 'practically irreversible' and that 'within a few years' the government will be legitimized through free, transparent, and safe elections.

¶13. (U) Following the closed-door session, spokesperson Augusto Carneiro announced the Conselho's unanimous recommendation to hold Legislative elections in the May - August 2008 timeframe, and majority support for the recommendation to hold Presidential elections during the same time period in 2009. Although the bulk of voter registration is expected conclude on 15 June 2007 the task does not end there, explained Virgilio Fontes Pereira, Chairman of the Interministerial Commission for the Electoral Process (CIPE), speaking to the press after the meeting. Pereira pointed out that the preparation, publication, and final certification of

voter lists, as required by electoral law, is not likely to be finalized before November 2007. As the President is required to give a minimum 90 days notice when calling elections, Pereira stated that he sees no possibility of elections in 2007.

Secretive and controversial history

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14. (SBU) The Conselho da Republica, a consultative body comprised of opposition leaders, presidential nominees, and key government figures, by law must meet at least twice per year. Despite this requirement, the Conselho was last convened in July 2004, when it recommended that elections be held in 2006. This session was marked by controversy when MP Fulupinga Landu Victor, President of the PDP-ANA party, broke ranks. For the first time in Conselho history he revealed that the vote had not been unanimous, that during contentious discussion many demanded elections in 2005. He was shot dead in a robbery 6 hours later, and the fact that the historically secretive Conselho has not met since fostered many conspiracy theories. The broadcast of dos Santos's opening speech and the open admission at the post-meeting press conference that one of the votes had not been unanimous is seen by many as progress towards government openness.

USG Next Steps

15. (C) In 2004, the Council called for elections in 2006, but there was no move to make the date official. International efforts should now be focused on getting the government to codify the Council's recommendations and set

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firm dates for the elections. Unless these dates are established, we run the risk of repeating the years of uncertainty that proceeded the last announcement. We should take advantage of the openness demonstrated in the public release of information regarding the council's deliberations to press for a firm electoral date. We can also push for the two elections to be held simultaneously or at least in the same year, but finally setting a date for the elections is a more pressing priority.

16. (C) COMMENT: Per electoral law, the President of the Republic is required to meet with the Council of the Republic prior to setting election dates, but their role is merely to recommend action. Now the President, the Council of Ministers and the National Electoral Council need to make the dates official. Recent polls by IRI (septel) show that the ruling MPLA has overwhelming support from the electorate, and government funding of opposition parties (the parties' most important, and often sole, revenue source) is linked to electoral results. Thus, more time gives the parties a better chance to consolidate their electoral base. As far as the presidential elections, the delay gives all parties more time to define who will be on the ticket and work out their internal conflicts. Thus, while the majority of the electorate wants simultaneous presidential and legislative elections, the political parties seem to have a slightly different perception. End comment.

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